

REVIEWS OF BOOKS.

"BESIDE THE OLD BRASS ANDIRONS."

An artistic brochure with the above title, printed but not published by Alma Winston Wilson, is a collection of reminiscences and old family letters too personal and intimate for public perusal, but with passages of more general interest to the favored reader who is not of the family circle. The subject matter, for the most part, has to do with the Indianapolis of seventy-five or eighty years ago, and every glimpse of life here at that period, that is at all fresh and authentic, is so much rescued from oblivion; though as above intimated, much of it is too closely interwoven with the personal to be quoted here with propriety. This charming description of the old John G. Brown homestead on Meridian street, however, can be quoted:

"For more than fifty years there stood, fronting Meridian street (on a portion of the ground now covered by the Federal building), a frame house of quaint design, surrounded by a beautiful lawn, beautifully kept, and forest trees of primeval date.

"The house was large and roomy, with wide halls and porches which made it attractive. Especially delightful was the large hall in the rear, with folding doors at the east side, which were kept open in summer, thereby converting it into an enclosed porch, where one might sit, sheltered from heat or rain, and look out upon the lawn in the rear of the house, where flowering bushes and shrubs vied with each other in shedding their sweetest perfume. Within a short distance from this porch stood the well, over which waved an old weeping willow, with a grace and beauty never seen in other trees."

This old house was, in 1833, one of the social centers of the little capital, and the author heightens the charm of it by a little true love story, romantic enough to furnish the motive for a fictionist. An excellent picture of the homestead and its grounds accompanies the text. That spot is wonderfully transformed

now, but those who knew it fifteen or twenty years ago will recall the then venerable and shabby relic, shorn of most of its yard and crowded by buildings on either side. It stood nearly opposite the present Willoughby building.

One of the especially interesting letters here put in print was written by William McPherson who in 1833 was drowned in White river through the agency of one Mike Van Blaricum, and who is remembered in local history as the first person murdered in Indianapolis. The Holloway history in a passing, gossipy way, leaves a shadow resting on McPherson's name, but the testimony in this little book and in this letter, speaking after all these years, tends to dispel it. The letter gives evidence of culture and a refined, sensitive and generous character. In this connection we would mention a fugitive story told by the late General John Coburn, who, at the time of the tragedy, was a small boy and attended a school taught by McPherson, whom he described as "a handsome man beloved by all the boys." Van Blaricum, who was tried for the murder, sentenced to prison for three years and pardoned by Governor Noble when his time was half up, was a changed man after the event. He feared to stir abroad after nightfall, and what Mr. Coburn called the first ghost story of Indianapolis was to the effect that Van Blaricum was haunted by the ghost of his victim. Van Blaricum's own story was that twice he had met McPherson, once at the mouth of the old covered bridge and again in a cornfield where the apparition rose up between the rows of corn and shot at him with a rifle. Years after, when Mr. Coburn was in Congress, he met Edward McPherson, a brother of William, who affirmed that after the pardoning of his brother's murderer, he came to Indianapolis with the purpose of having vengeance; that he stayed here a month seeking a chance, and that once he waylaid his man in a cornfield and shot at him. He had borne, he said, a striking resemblance to his brother. In view of this story one can readily conceive that the guilty Van Blaricum believed in a supernatural visitation.

A number of the letters printed in the booklet are written by

Larzarus B. Wilson, father of the compiler and of the late Major Oliver M. Wilson. Mr. Wilson, a man of parts, would have been better known in local history but for his own aversion to publicity which discountenanced all personal advertising. In Sulgrove's history, on page 107, we find him mentioned as having furnished the plans for the old National Road bridge over White river, and these letters give glimpses of him as a surveyor and a co-worker with Jesse L. Williams during the internal improvement era. He was a son of Thomas Wilson, the Revolutionary soldier who received the standards from Cornwallis's army at the Yorktown surrender, and was himself a soldier in the war of 1812. He was for many years a citizen of Indianapolis, dying there in 1875.

THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIANA.

A little book with the above title, by Demarchus C. Brown, State Librarian of Indiana, is designed as an outline presentation of the subject for use in the schools. The book is but a guide to the young student, who, in the opinion of the author, should "think and investigate somewhat for himself." To this end a bibliography of works bearing upon the subject is given, with the suggestion that through these the teacher direct the supplementary reading of the pupils.

As a compact little book, defined in its purpose, but not too ambitious, this manual fills a place, and it borrows value from the fact that Professor Brown, being himself an experienced educator, adapts it exactly to its purpose. Besides a brief survey of the governmental functions, we find the Ordinance of 1787, the present Constitution and a list of the Governors from Arthur St. Clair to Thomas R. Marshall. There is also a good index.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF GURDON SALTONSTALL HUBBARD.

The autobiography of Gurdon Saltonstall Hubbard, early settler of Chicago and old trader, is a contribution to the history of